

REMARKS ON THE CALIFORNIAN VULTURE  
(*PSEUDOGRYPHUS CALIFORNIANUS*).

BY ROBERT RIDGWAY.

AMONG some remarks by me respecting the distinctive characters of the genus *Pseudogryphus*, published in the 'Nuttall Bulletin' for April, 1880, p. 80, occurs the following statement: "In the enumeration of the diagnostic characters of this genus in 'History of North American Birds' (Vol. III, pp. 337, 338), . . . a very important one was overlooked, viz., the possession of fourteen rectrices, in which '*Vultur*' *californianus* apparently differs from all other *Sarcorhamphidæ*." Subsequently, Mr. J. H. Gurney wrote me asking whether all specimens in the National Museum collection possessed fourteen rectrices, and stating that he had not been able to find more than twelve in those preserved in the Norwich Museum. This prompted a reëxamination into the matter, with results tending to annul, in great measure, the statement quoted, since it is proven that the possession of fourteen rectrices by this species is, if not exceptional, at least not the rule. The writer is unable to remember the basis of his statement that *P. californianus* possessed this number of tail-feathers, but it was probably based on the adult specimen described in 'History of North American Birds,' (Vol. III, p. 339), now no longer in the National Museum collection, having been a badly prepared, unpoisoned skin, which was subsequently destroyed by insects. The only two examples now in the National Museum, both young birds, each possess but twelve rectrices, as do also two fine adults in Mr. Henshaw's collection. A specimen in the American Museum of Natural History, in New York City, however, possesses *thirteen* tail-feathers, one being wanting, so there must have been originally fourteen, which is the number represented by Audubon in his plate of this species and, according to Mr. Gurney (Cat. Diurn. Accipitres, 1884, p. 3, foot-note), being "a peculiarity first noticed by Audubon," though I am unable to find where he makes mention of it, since in his description (B. Am., oct. ed., I, p. 14) he gives the number as twelve. Swainson and Richardson (Fauna Boreali-Americana, II, p. 3) in their description of this species,

based on "male and female specimens shot by Mr. Douglas, in lat.  $45\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  N., and now in the Museum of the Zoölogical Society," state that "the tail is even, and consists of fourteen feathers"; so there can be no doubt that the number of tail-feathers in this species is variable, and therefore not available as a generic character.

In my article referred to above, it is stated that this species is "fully the peer of the Condor in size, the wing and tail averaging even decidedly greater. It is not, however, quite so strongly built, the beak and feet being proportionately weaker." Comparative measurements were there given of fully adult males of the two species, showing that by a similar method of deduction, the alar expanse should be about 9 feet 2 inches in *S. gryphus*, and 9 feet 8 inches in *P. californianus*. I was not aware at the time that the latter figures were exactly those of an adult obtained by Douglas, as recorded by Swainson and Richardson (l. c.), nor had I read Professor Orton's paper in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History.' Vol. VIII, 1871, pp. 185-192, entitled 'On the Condors of the Equatorial Andes,' in which the exaggerations of writers in respect to the size of the Condor are the subject specially treated, and from which the following is quoted: "A full-grown male from the most celebrated locality in the Andes, now in Vassar College, has a stretch of nine feet. Humboldt never found one to measure over nine feet; and the largest specimen seen by Darwin was eight and a half feet from tip to tip. An old male in the Zoölogical Gardens of London measures eleven feet. Von Tschudi says he found one with a spread of fourteen feet ten inches; but he invalidates his testimony by the subsequent statement that the full-grown condor measures from twelve to thirteen feet."

The two adult Californian Vultures in Mr. Henshaw's collection, both measured and weighed by Mr. Henshaw before skinning, were males; one spread eight feet nine inches and weighed twenty pounds, while the other spread nine feet one inch and weighed twenty-three pounds. Mr. Henshaw, while in the locality where his specimens were shot, was informed by perfectly reliable persons of two killed the previous year which spread eleven feet, by careful measurement.

Mr. Henshaw's specimens are neither of them very old birds, having the bill still tinged with horn-color, and are decidedly

smaller than some that have been examined, as the following measurements, taken from the dried skins, will show. The fresh colors of the soft parts, the alar extent, and weight, noted by Mr. Henshaw before the specimens were skinned, are also given:—

*Larger specimen*: Wing, 32.00 inches; tail, 16.00; culmen, 1.50, depth of bill, 1.25, width, .95; length of head, from point of bill to occiput, 6.00; tarsus, 4.70; middle toe, 4.10, with claw, 5.45. Weight, 23 lbs.; spread of wings, 9 feet, 1 inch. "Head and neck light yellow, fading to pinkish on lower neck; iris reddish brown; feet dull bluish white."

*Smaller specimen*: Wing, 31.25 inches; tail, 15.50; culmen, 1.50, depth of bill, 1.20, width, .95; length of head, 6.20; tarsus, 4.40; middle toe, 4.00, with claw, 5.40. Weight, 20 lbs.; spread of wings, 8 feet, 9 inches. "Head and neck light orange; iris red; feet pinkish flesh color."

Since the above was put in type, four specimens in the flesh have been received at the National Museum. The weight, after their reception was not taken, on account of the specimens having been eviscerated; but they were carefully measured, with the following result:—

No. 103,064, *adult*, U.S. Nat. Mus.—Total length, 44 inches; extent of wings, 110.70 inches.

No. 103,065, *juv.* (first year).—Total length, 44.25 inches; extent of wings, 98.50 inches.

No. 103,066, *juv.* (first year).—Total length, 46.50 inches; extent of wings, 108.25 inches.

No. 103,067, *juv.* (first year).—Total length, 43.50 inches; extent of wings, 106 inches.

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## NOTE ON *SARCORHAMPHUS ÆQUATORIALIS* SHARPE.

BY ROBERT RIDGWAY.

IN Volume I of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' Mr. R. Bowdler Sharpe describes, under the name *Sarcorhamphus æquatorialis* (p. 21), a supposed new species of Condor, to which the following characters were ascribed: "Smaller than *S. gryphus*; entirely brown in plumage; bill blackish." The habitat was given as Ecuador (Quito) and, with